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ABSTRACT

Gender-related problems that need to be addressed in the interpersonal speech communication classroom can be broken down into three categories: awareness, involvement, and understanding. Awareness is the key to gender equity in the classroom. The faculty member has the responsibility to be aware of his or her habits regarding calling on individuals and to make sure students have the chance to participate if they want to. Understanding the role of a gender-sensitive instructor in the classroom is equally important. The instructor's awareness should be focused on the areas of language, classroom style, and responding to students. Language in the classroom can be easily handled by a simple exercise involving the students. The exercise deals with identifying sexist language, but in order to have an impact, this exercise must be conducted daily. Professors must try to keep the classroom climate open, both to men and women. Research shows that professors typically call on men by name more often than they do women; they are more attentive to men's comments and questions; they word questions as though no women were present; and they will even divert discussion to comment on a woman's appearance. After becoming aware of the classroom and gender-related practices in it, the professor must then involve his or her students in activities intended to raise their level of awareness of concepts and ideas of gender. One activity might involve a role play; another could involve group discussions in single-sex groups. (Contains classroom handouts on awareness of sexual stereotyping, and avoidance of sexist language.) (TB)

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ED 385 870

Gender in Interpersonal Communication

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Running head: INTERPERSONAL GENDER

Addressing Three Areas:

Unlike other areas in the field of Speech Communication, Interpersonal Communication is a discipline which is strongly associated with gender. Every aspect of the course deals with examining the outcomes of interaction between man and woman, woman to woman, and man to man. Therefore, there is no real problem of not having gender issues in the classroom. There are still problems that do need to be addressed in the interpersonal classroom. These problems can be broken down into three categories: awareness, involvement, and understanding.

Awareness is the key to gender equity in the classroom. Studies have shown that males are called upon more than females to answer questions and even tend to ask more questions. The faculty member has the responsibility to be aware of the habits they have in regards to calling on individuals and to make sure students have the chance to be a part of the class and at times, to make them be a part. All to often, students want to speak up in class and give input, but the faculty member does not take the time to notice the student's nonverbal behaviors. In the interpersonal classroom it is imperative that the teacher notice the students and call on them to relate their experiences to the rest of the class. Understanding this is the first step of being aware of gender in the classroom, thus being self aware.

Understanding the role of a gender sensitive instructor in the classroom is equally important. Wood & Lenze (1991) state: "gender insensitivity may also result from pedagogical processes, which consist largely of instructors' language, classroom style, and ways of responding to students..." Therefore in order to understand gender

communication in the interpersonal classroom instructors' awareness should be focused on three areas; language, classroom style, and responding to students.

Language in the classroom can easily be handle by a simple exercise involving the students. The exercise deals with identifying sexist language, but in order to have an impact on the students this exercise needs to be taken a step further and dealt with on a daily basis. This can be done by calling on those students who use sexist language and continually making them aware, in a non-degrading fashion, of the sexist terminology they are using.

After interviewing a couple of the students who have taken interpersonal communication, they often mentioned the barriers of language and the language used in the classroom helped reinforce the culture taught to them from birth. As they pointed out language is focused on the man (postman, taxman). More importantly, behind the concept of language in the classroom is the idea that by using the terminology the teacher restricts the freedom of both genders to think beyond those stereotypes.

Classroom style has a wide spectrum of meanings throughout education, but what comes to mind is the climate of the classroom and the style imposing the climate. Many times an instructor does not want to admit mistakes to students. What happens then is the climate of the classroom is cold and limited to one view point. In the realm of interpersonal communication view points are the foundation to which learning takes place. Everyone has different experiences and those experiences make interpersonal communication effective. If the instructor's demeanor does not allow students to effectively add input to the class then the information has no depth or meaning to the student. There are several ways to increase

participation to benefit the climate of the class.

The first way is to keep open communication with the class is to deal with the students on a level that they can question what an instructor says and how information is stated. In other words, if the teacher can catch their students using sexist language then the student should be able to call attention to the sexist language also. This will also let the instructor know the students understand the idea of sexist language and the stereotyping that goes along with the usage.

A second way is to add self disclosure to practical examples. This not only allows the student to know that instructors are human, but also makes them feel comfortable to add their own personal examples, and thus add to the depth of the classroom. The information then should be able to flow freely with simple application of theories and concepts.

An article by Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler as found in (cited in Bate,1988) outlines some of the subtle ways a "chilly climate" is produced for women.

1. Professors call on men by name more often than they do women and, when they refer to women, use nicknames more often than they do with men.
2. Comments by professors divert discussion about a woman's work to the topic of her appearance; the same does not occur with men.
3. Faculty are more attentive to men's comments and questions than to women's questions, giving more eye contact to men and probing for more elaboration from them.
4. Examples are often worded as if no women were present, for example, "imagine that your wife...."

5. Answers by males are often extended by the instructor and later referred to by the male student's name, while the females' ideas often receive a quick nod or "hmm" followed by a change of focus.

Each of these five points directly relates to one of two items, either the language or response to students by the instructor. The main focus is on questions, examining two areas; first asking and secondly responding. In asking questions the first step is to develop the classroom climate. After this is done stimulate responses by actually calling on the student by name. In some cases this may have negative impact on the student but if there is an open climate in the classroom the students can be receptive.

An example of this was told to me by several students after one class meeting. During the whole quarter there was one woman in the class who always sat near the back and was attentive, but she was never real open in her ideas of the information presented in class. One day while having a class discussion, I slowed the discussion and called on her by name. What happened next enthused the whole class. She spoke and what she had to say had great impact on the bearing of the class. She was not embarrassed or judged for what she said. The entire class then joined in and kept her involved in the discussion. After the class several students approached me. All of them were delighted with the student's input and amazed by how she expanded the realm of discussion. From that point on the student added freely to the class.

Only 11% (Pearson & West, 1991, p. 28) of females ask questions to male instructors and 9% to female instructors. Our obligation to students is to make them feel comfortable enough to ask questions, and let learning go from instructor centered to student

centered. In order to reach this goal there has to be an understanding of the impacts of gender in the classroom.

After becoming aware of the culture of the classroom and the use of gender the next phase is getting the student involved with the concept and ideals of gender. The easiest answer here is to initiate active learning in the classroom. There are many aspects to active learning techniques that can and could be used to develop gender in the classroom. Moving from lecture to a discussion format for the student to learn could be one of them (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

Beyond just the idea of active learning there are two activities beneficial to student development in gender for interpersonal communication. The first of these is role playing. In Devito' s The Interpersonal Communication Book (6th ed.) many of the examples portray Chris and Pat. Well, it is the concept of gender neutral names catches the student's eyes. They begin to stereotype whether or not Chris is the male or female or if Pat is one or the other. An activity to help alleviate this is to let the student's role play both as the female and then the male. This way they can experiment with both perspectives of the problem and are not cast into a category of a learned response to a certain stimulation. Then discuss with the students after both sides have been explored how the different genders portrayed each sex and why particular stereotypes well conceived.

Another activity that can be used during one of the first few classes is something called **Expectation's**. This a very simply activity used to stimulate discussion in the classroom and also to make students aware of the perceptions they have of one another. The activity can either be done in groups or by oneself. If the activity is done in a group

then it needs to be all males and all females in the group. Then once the students are divided there is one question to ask: **What are your expectations from your sex and what do you expect from the opposite sex?** Give the class time to complete the assignment in the group and then bring them back to discuss their findings as a class.

This is also interesting in an assignment format allowing the student a weekend to explore their feelings on the different expectations then come back into the classroom to discuss the results. By doing the activity this way some of the peer pressure can be reduced or the assignment can be a follow-up to the original group discussion.

Finally, in the sense that we will make mistake as humans, students need to feel secure in making instructors aware of those mistakes. As instructors in the field of communication there needs to be an understanding of how gender can be affective. The key is guidance. Students need room to grow and develop their own thoughts about interpersonal communication theories. If the instructor is understanding to this area of growth the student is likely to understand the complexities of gender variances within society. Yet, if the instructor only inspires the student to learn one concrete paradigm there can be no self understanding by the student. One of the jobs of a instructor is not to give answers, but to give a student the proper tools necessary to answer questions on their own. This includes questions on gender in interpersonal communication.

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Awareness of Sexual Stereotyping

Fill in the blanks:

1. After a hard day on the job, the secretary _____

   _____

2. When the plumber arrived at my house _____

   _____

3. The doctor was most helpful with my problems; in fact _____

   _____

4. My child's teacher is outstanding; for example _____

   _____

5. When basketball player graduates from college _____

   _____

6. On the tour the president was accompanied by _____

   _____

7. While I was in the hospital I had the most wonderful nurse; in fact _____

   _____

8. When the construction supervisor arrived at the scene of the accident _____

   _____

Avoiding Sexist Language

What alternatives can you suggest for the following words?

Early man _____

Mankind _____

Mailman _____

Manmade _____

Congressman _____

Chairman _____

Repairman _____

Businessman _____

Manpower _____

What others can you think of?